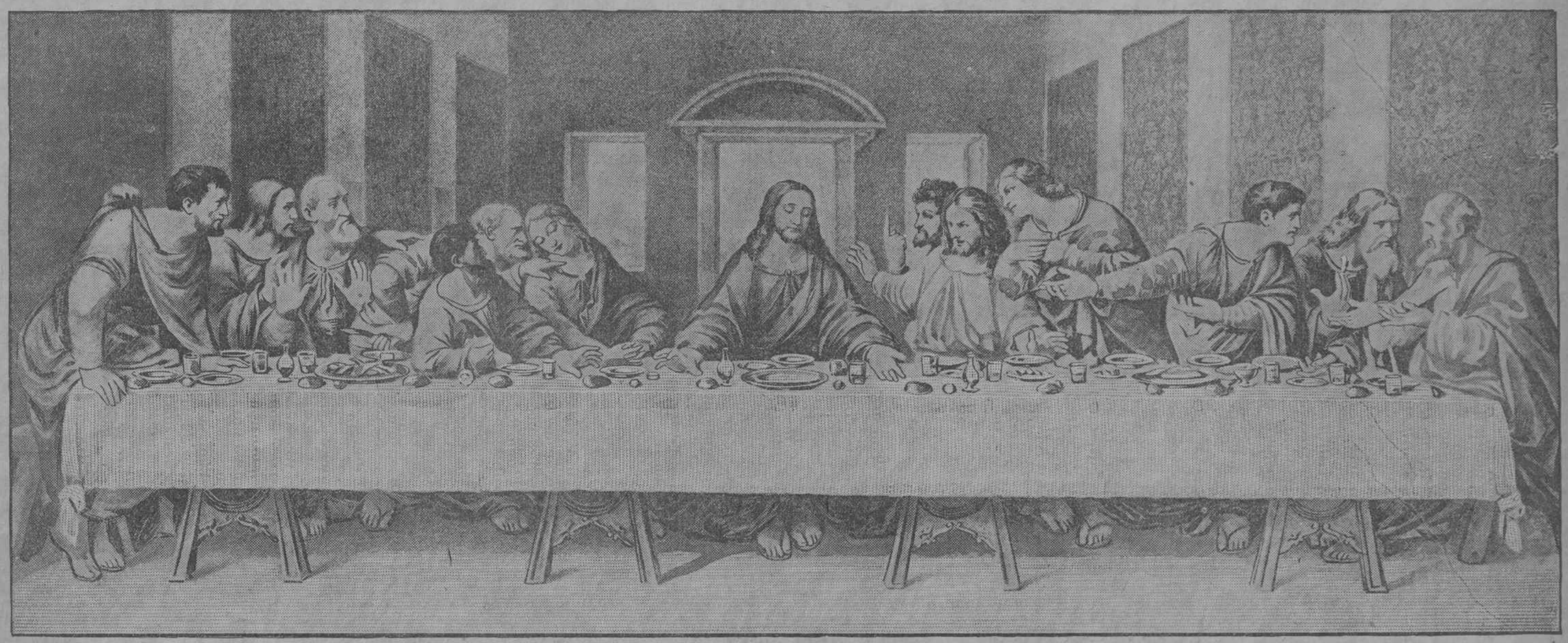
"The Last Supper"---Priceless Art Treasure Crumbling to Dust.



THIS IS THE GREAT LEONARDO DA VINCI'S IMMORTAL MASTERPIECE "THE LAST SUPPER" WHICH IS ROTTING AWAY ON THE WALL OF THE CONVENT OF SANTA MARIA DELLE GRAZIE, MILAN.

IT will be terrible news to all who have a soul for art to hear that "The Last Supper," of Leonardo da Vinci, is doomed to speedy destruction.

The picture is rapidly falling to pieces, and it is sadly admitted that there is no way of saving it.

The fact that the picture is a fresco makes it impossible to use the ordinary methods of restoring canvases. Leonardo's greatest work is painted on a wall of the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, at Milan.

The picture is now more than two-thirds obliterated, and it is hardly recognizable. If it were not for the many admirable copies of it which are in existence, we should be quite unable to appreciate the true beauties of this masterpiece. It is, in fact, from the famous copy by Oggione, and not from the original, that the general public derives its idea of the work. From this a celebrated engraving was made by Raphael Morghen in 1800, from which time the popular familiarity with the picture may be said to date.

It is curious to reflect that in entrusting his work to a wall Leonardo made it more perishable than if he had put it upon canvas. The old masters used colors that are practically imperishable if the pictures receive reasonable care, but this painting on the wall was subject to dampness and the ceaseless changes of the weather.

Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" is one of the very greatest pictures in the world. It was painted in 1498. If it were in a condition in which it could be removed and preserved, it would be worth millions of dollars.

At a moment when this great masterpiece is about to vanish from our eyes forever, it becomes the duty of every one to inform himself concerning it. We cannot do this better than by reading the beautiful and sympathetic description of it by Mrs. Anne Jameson in her famous work, "Sacred and Legendary Art:"

The purpose being the decoration of a refectory in a rich convent (Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan), the chamber lofty and spacious, Leonardo has adopted the usual arrangement; the table runs across from side to side, filling up the whole extent of the wall, and the figures, being above the eye, and to be viewed at a distance, are colossal; they would otherwise have appeared smaller than the real personages seated at the tables below. The moment selected is the utterance of the words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me;" or, rather, the words have just been uttered, and the picture expresses their effect on the different auditors.

It is of these auditors, His Apostles, that I have to speak, and not of Christ Himself, for the full consideration of the subject, as it regards Him, must be deferred; the intellectual elevation, the fineness of nature, the God-like dignity, suffused with the profoundest sorrow, in this Divine head, surpassed all I could have conceived as possible in art; and, faded as it is, the character there, being stamped on it by the soul, not the hand, of the artist, will remain while a line or hue remains visible. It is a Divine shadow, and, until it fades into nothing, and disappears utterly, will have the lineaments of divinity.

Next to Christ is St. John; he has just been addressed by Peter, who beckons to him that he should ask, "Of whom the Lord spake." His disconsolate attitude, as he has raised himself to reply, and leans his clasped hands on the table, the almost feminine sweetness of his countenance, express the character of this gentle and amiable apostle. Peter, leaning from behind, is all fire and energy; Judas, who knows full well of whom the Saviour spake, starts back amazed, oversetting the salt; his fingers clutch the bag, of which he has the charge, with that action which Dante describes as characteristic of the avaricious:

Questi resurgeranno dal sepolcro
Col pugno chiuso.

These from the tomb with clenched grasp shall rise.

His face is seen in profile and cast into shadow; without being vulgar, or even ugly, it is hateful. St. Andrew, with his long, gray beard, lifts up his hands, expressing the wonder of a simple-hearted old man. St. James Minor, resembling the Saviour in his mild features and the form of his beard and hair, lays his hand on the shoulder of St. Peter. The expression is: "Can it be possible? Have we heard aright?" Bartholomew, at the extreme end of the table, has risen, perturbed, from his seat. He leans forward with a look of eager attention, the lips parted. He is impatient to hear more. (The fine copy of Oggione in the Royal Academy does not give this anxious look—he is attentive only.)

On the left of our Saviour is St. James Major, who has also a family resemblance to Christ. His arms are outstretched; he shrinks back; he repels the thought with horror. The vivacity of the action and expression are wonderfully true and characteristic. (Morghen, the engraver, erroneously supposed this to represent St. Thomas, and placed on the border of his robe an inscription fixing his identity, which description, as Bossi asserts, never did exist in the original picture.) St. Thomas is behind St. James, rather young, with a short beard. He holds up his hand, threatening—"If there be indeed such a wretch, let him look to it!" Philip, young and with a beautiful head, lays his hand on his heart. He protests his love, his truth.

Matthew, also beardless, has more elegance, as one who belonged to a more educated class than the rest. He turns to Jude and points to our Saviour, as if about to repeat His words. "Do you hear what He says?" Simon and Judge sit together. (Leonardo has followed the tradition which makes them old and brothers.) Jude expresses consternation; Simon, with his hands stretched out, a painful anxiety.

To understand the wonderful skill with which this composition has been arranged it ought to be studied long and minutely; and to appreciate its relative excellence it ought to be compared with other productions of the same period. Leonardo has contrived to break the formality of the line of heads without any apparent artifice, and without disturbing the grand simplicity of the usual order; and he has vanquished the difficulties in regard to the position of Judas without making him too prominent. He has imparted to a solemn scene sufficient movement and variety of action, without detracting from its dignity or pathos; He has kept the expression of each head true to the traditional character, without exaggeration, without effort.

Composite Photograph of 300 Madonnas.

Curiously Interesting Religious and Photographic Triumph of Artist J. G. Kitchell, of Indianapolis.

COPYRIGHT, 1899, BY J. G. KITCHELL, OF INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind., Dec. 7.—After eight months' labor in his studio Joseph Gray Kitchell has produced a unique photograph. It is a composite of all the Madonnas which the master artists of the world have been painting for fifteen hundred years.

The result is the production of a new and distinct type of this cherished subject.

Mr. Kitchell set about this task by getting photographs of three hundred existing Madonnas. One after another he combined these pictures by the process commonly used by photographers of taking one picture after another on the same plate.

This usually produces a blurred effect, in which the features of all are merged together.

By skilful manipulation Mr. Kitchell has succeeded in making a composite picture that is fairly distinct. It blends features and expressions of many pictures without destroying their individualities.

It required the best of lenses to do this work. Photographic plates of peculiar sensitiveness to tints and shades were also needed.

The picture which has been produced is virtually a new Madonna.

It is regarded as the most remarkable accomplishment of the modern device of making composite pictures.

Such a novelty is it considered at the Congressional Library at Washington that it has been ordered to be put on exhibition there.

It will later on be brought to New York, to be shown to art lovers and photographers and amateurs.

This picture illustrates to what a fine art the making of composite photographs has been carried.

The first attempts in this direction, but a few years ago, were merely distorted caricatures. Composite pictures are now recognized as having scientific value.

The most common scientific purpose to which they are put is for obtaining a normal or average type of the features of a number of individuals.

Some peculiar effects have been obtained. Photographs of a father and mother have been combined, showing a striking resemblance to some of their children. Francis Galton was the first photographer to produce composites.

The attainment of the composite in modern photography was made possible by the perfected lenses of Jena glass, special plates and a simple but ingenious appliance for correct position of the pictures while being photographed, so that the lines of the nose and mouth were in proper register.

Each picture in a class was photographed successively on a plate that became the composite negative of its class. Each class was similarly photographed and printed from each negative thus obtained and afforded the material for final composite negatives, from which the Kitchell composite Madonna is a direct print.

Before beginning this work Mr. Kitchell made a close study of all the famous beauty types of the Madonna, having in view the object of concentrating as far as possible all those masterpieces.

The result is a marvellous composite, and for a blend of so many faces it is remarkably distinct; yet it is strangely mysterious and spiritual. It is a face different from any ever seen—difficult to describe or analyze—a face of unmistakable youth, a sweet, pure, girlish countenance. Compare it with any of the separate units that compose it, and it shows a suggestion of them all, while its beauty many connoisseurs think it exceeds any of the individual subjects composing it. The composite Madonna is a heavy black carbon deposit on a plate of pure silver, as an accomplishment, photographers say, demonstrating what is possible in scientific photography.

"I have long had a desire," says Mr. Kitchell, "to produce in one photograph an image of the Madonna which realizes the ideals of all the artists that have ever painted this subject.

"Photography assists alike the scientist and the artist, and it was the only known agency whereby the work of many hundred artists might be truthfully summarized in the representative total unit—the composite Madonna being the result.

"The practicability of the scheme was beyond dispute, and could be likened in some particulars to many and more familiar propositions in mathematics, but in photography the proposition is expressed in lines and proportions as unerring as the laws of light."

The first completed photograph was sent to the Congressional Library.

Mr. Kitchell is thirty-five years old and comes of a family of artists. He was born in Cincinnati, spent ten years in New York, and removed to Indianapolis two years ago. An uncle was awarded the Legion of Honor cross in France, and a cousin is Mme. Juli-Rivi-King, the pianiste.

Among the many famous paintings of the Madonna that Mr. Kitchell used in making this picture the following are the most noted:

The Madonna and Child, with St. John," by Raphael, is one of the most admired paintings of sacred subjects in the National Gallery of London. A copy of Raphael's Sistine Madonna at the Dresden Gallery, one of the most famous pictures in the world, was also used in making the present composite pictures.

Besides these two Madonna types, Mr. Kitchell used photographs of Sandro Botticelli's painting of Madonna and Child in the National Gallery at London; Murillo's Madonna, in the Dresden Gallery; Titian's Madonna, in the National Gallery of London; the Madonna of the Marlborough collection, besides photographs of hundreds of other Madonnas in European galleries.

Mr. Kitchell's Madonna has already aroused a great deal of interest and curiosity throughout the country, not only among art critics and collectors, but among people who make no pretensions to technical knowledge of such subjects.

It appeals to the religious instinct as well as to the artistic. No matter to what church one belongs or how liberal he may be the picture of the Mother of Christ has a fascination. A subject that has inspired artists to their greatest efforts since the Christian era began still retains its hold on the human mind and heart. It is the highest expression of feminine purity and beauty.